

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RAPPAHANNOCK AREA HEALTH DISTRICT REMINDS RESIDENTS THAT EXTREME HEAT REQUIRES PROTECTIVE ACTIONS

Health Officials Urge Residents to Stay Cool, Stay Hydrated and Stay Informed

(Fredericksburg, Va.)— As the summertime temperatures arrive, the health department reminds residents that extreme heat requires protective actions. Summer temperatures in Virginia normally climb into the upper 90's and even reach over 100 degrees at times. The hot temperatures and high heat indexes can cause ill health effects. "We encourage all residents to take the necessary precautions to protect against heat-related illness" said District Health Director, Brooke Rossheim, MD, MPH.

Heat can cause harmful health effects by pushing the human body beyond its limits. In extreme conditions, evaporation is slowed and the body must work extra hard to maintain a normal temperature. Last year in Virginia, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reported 5 deaths due to the heat alone. In 2013 and 2012, there were 5 and 21 deaths, respectively. Staying cool, hydrated and informed can save lives.

The people most at risk are the elderly, those who work or exercise outdoors, infants and children, low income individuals, and people with a chronic medical condition, especially if they are not in an air-conditioned environment. If you know someone in this situation, check on them to see how they are doing during periods of excessive heat.

Here are steps you can take to protect yourself and others against heat-related illnesses:

- Keep cool in an air-conditioned area. Take a cool shower or a bath. Consider a trip to the mall or a local library or visit a friend with air conditioning. Spending at least two hours per day in air conditioning significantly reduces the risk of heat-related illnesses. When temperatures reach the upper 90s or above, a fan may not prevent heat-related illness.
- Drink plenty of fluids (2-4 glasses of cool fluids each hour.) To replace salt and minerals lost from sweating, drink fruit juice or a sports beverage during exercise or when you have to work outside. However, talk to your doctor first if you're on a fluid-restricted diet or medications, or on a low-salt diet.
- Never leave children or pets alone in a car for **any** period of time, even with the air-conditioning on or the windows cracked. Temperatures inside a car can reach more than 150 degrees quickly, resulting in heat stroke and death.
- Avoid sunburn and wear light clothing. Sunburn limits your body's ability to keep itself cool and causes loss of body fluids. Use sunscreen with a high SPF. Lighter-weight clothing that is loose fitting and light colored is more comfortable during extreme temperatures. Use a hat to keep the head cool.

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Excessive Heat, Continued

- Use the “buddy system” if you’re working outside. If you’re working outside and suffer a heat-related illness, you could become confused or could lose consciousness. Therefore, make sure someone else knows of your plans.
- Schedule or reschedule activities and outdoor work for the coolest parts of the day. In the summer, sunlight exposure is greatest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Check on your neighbors. Although anyone can suffer heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. People aged 65 or older are particularly susceptible to heat-related illnesses and complications that can result during periods of high temperatures and humidity.
- Stay informed by monitoring for heat-related notices issued by the National Weather Service.

For more information about heat-related illnesses, visit the Virginia Department of Health’s website at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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